



BioMap and Living Waters

Guiding Land Conservation for Biodiversity in Massachusetts

Core Habitats of Cummington

This report and associated map provide information about important sites for biodiversity conservation in your area.

This information is intended for conservation planning, and is not intended for use in state regulations.

Produced by:
Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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* Depending on the location of Core Habitats, your city or town may not have all of these sections.

Spring Salamander
(*Gyrinophilus porphyriticus*)
Species of Special Concern



Funding for this project was made available by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, contributions to the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Fund, and through the State Wildlife Grants Program of the US Fish & Wildlife Service.



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Introduction

In this report, the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program provides you with site-specific biodiversity information for your area. Protecting our biodiversity today will help ensure the full variety of species and natural communities that comprise our native flora and fauna will persist for generations to come.

The information in this report is the result of two statewide biodiversity conservation planning projects, **BioMap** and **Living Waters**. The goal of the BioMap project, completed in 2001, was to identify and delineate the most important areas for the long-term viability of terrestrial, wetland, and estuarine elements of biodiversity in Massachusetts. The goal of the Living Waters project, completed in 2003, was to identify and delineate the rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds that are important for freshwater biodiversity in the Commonwealth. These two conservation plans are based on documented observations of rare species, natural communities, and exemplary habitats.

What is a Core Habitat?

Both BioMap and Living Waters delineate **Core Habitats** that identify the most critical sites for biodiversity conservation across the state. Core Habitats represent habitat for the state's most viable rare plant and animal populations and include exemplary natural communities and aquatic habitats. Core Habitats represent a wide diversity of rare species and natural communities (see Table 1), and these areas are also thought to contain virtually all of the other described species in Massachusetts. Statewide, BioMap Core Habitats encompass 1,380,000 acres of uplands and wetlands, and Living Waters identifies 429 Core Habitats in rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds.



Core Habitats and Land Conservation

One of the most effective ways to protect biodiversity for future generations is to protect Core Habitats from adverse human impacts through land conservation. For Living Waters Core Habitats, protection efforts should focus on the **riparian areas**, the areas of land adjacent to water bodies. A naturally vegetated buffer that extends 330 feet (100 meters) from the water's edge helps to maintain cooler water temperature and to maintain the nutrients, energy, and natural flow of water needed by freshwater species.

In Support of Core Habitats

To further ensure the protection of Core Habitats and Massachusetts' biodiversity in the long-term, the BioMap and Living Waters projects identify two additional areas that help support Core Habitats.

In BioMap, areas shown as **Supporting Natural Landscape** provide buffers around the Core Habitats, connectivity between Core Habitats, sufficient space for ecosystems to function, and contiguous undeveloped habitat for common species. Supporting Natural Landscape was



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generated using a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) model, and its exact boundaries are less important than the general areas that it identifies. Supporting Natural Landscape represents potential land protection priorities once Core Habitat protection has been addressed.

In Living Waters, *Critical Supporting Watersheds* highlight the immediate portion of the watershed that sustains, or possibly degrades, each freshwater Core Habitat. These areas were also identified using a GIS model. Critical Supporting Watersheds represent developed and undeveloped lands, and can be quite large. Critical Supporting Watersheds can be helpful in land-use planning, and while they are not shown on these maps, they can be viewed in the Living Waters report or downloaded from www.mass.gov/mgis.

Understanding Core Habitat Species, Community, and Habitat Lists

What's in the List?

Included in this report is a list of the species, natural communities, and/or aquatic habitats for each Core Habitat in your city or town. The lists are organized by Core Habitat number.

For the larger Core Habitats that span more than one town, the species and community lists refer to the entire Core Habitat, not just the portion that falls within your city or town. For a list of all the state-listed rare species within your city or town's boundary, whether or not they are in Core Habitat, please see the town rare species lists available at www.nhesp.org.

The list of species and communities within a Core Habitat contains only the species and

Table 1. The number of rare species and types of natural communities explicitly included in the BioMap and Living Waters conservation plans, relative to the total number of native species statewide.

BioMap		
Biodiversity Group	Species and Verified Natural Community Types	
	Included in BioMap	Total Statewide
Vascular Plants	246	1,538
Birds	21	221 breeding species
Reptiles	11	25
Amphibians	6	21
Mammals	4	85
Moths and Butterflies	52	An estimated 2,500 to 3,000
Damselflies and Dragonflies	25	An estimated 165
Beetles	10	An estimated 2,500 to 4,000
Natural Communities	92	> 105 community types
Living Waters		
Biodiversity Group	Species	
	Included in Living Waters	Total Statewide
Aquatic Vascular Plants	23	114
Fishes	11	57
Mussels	7	12
Aquatic Invertebrates	23	An estimated > 2500

natural communities that were explicitly included in a given BioMap or Living Waters Core Habitat. Other rare species or examples of other natural communities may fall within the Core Habitat, but for various reasons are not included in the list. For instance, there are a few rare species that are omitted from the list or summary because of their particular sensitivity to the threat of collection. Likewise, the content of many very small Core Habitats are not described in this report or list, often because they contain a single location of a rare plant



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species. Some Core Habitats were created for suites of common species, such as forest birds, which are particularly threatened by habitat fragmentation. In these cases, the individual common species are not listed.

What does 'Status' mean?

The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife determines a status category for each rare species listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, M.G.L. c.131A, and its implementing regulations, 321 CMR 10.00. Rare species are categorized as Endangered, Threatened, or of Special Concern according to the following:

- **Endangered** species are in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range or are in danger of extirpation from Massachusetts.
- **Threatened** species are likely to become Endangered in Massachusetts in the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of their range.
- **Special Concern** species have suffered a decline that could threaten the species if allowed to continue unchecked or occur in such small numbers or with such restricted distribution or specialized habitat requirements that they could easily become Threatened in Massachusetts.

In addition, the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program maintains an unofficial **watch list** of plants that are tracked due to potential conservation interest or concern, but are not regulated under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act or other laws or regulations. Likewise, described natural communities are not regulated any laws or regulations, but they can help to identify ecologically important areas that are worthy of protection. The status of natural

Legal Protection of Biodiversity

BioMap and Living Waters present a powerful vision of what Massachusetts would look like with full protection of the land that supports most of our biodiversity. To create this vision, some populations of state-listed rare species were deemed more likely to survive over the long-term than others.

Regardless of their potential viability, all sites of state-listed species have full legal protection under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (M.G.L. c.131A) and its implementing regulations (321 CMR 10.00). Habitat of state-listed wildlife is also protected under the Wetlands Protection Act Regulations (310 CMR 10.37 and 10.59). The **Massachusetts Natural Heritage Atlas** shows **Priority Habitats**, which are used for regulation under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act and Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (M.G.L. c.30) and **Estimated Habitats**, which are used for regulation of rare wildlife habitat under the Wetlands Protection Act. For more information on rare species regulations, see the *Massachusetts Natural Heritage Atlas*, available from the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program in book and CD formats.

BioMap and Living Waters are conservation planning tools and do not, in any way, supplant the Estimated and Priority Habitat Maps which have regulatory significance. Unless and until the combined BioMap and Living Waters vision is fully realized, we must continue to protect all populations of our state-listed species and their habitats through environmental regulation.

communities reflects the documented number and acreages of each community type in the state:

- **Critically Imperiled** communities typically have 5 or fewer documented sites or have very few remaining acres in the state.
- **Imperiled** communities typically have 6-20 sites or few remaining acres in the state.
- **Vulnerable** communities typically have 21-100 sites or limited acreage across the state.
- **Secure** communities typically have over 100 sites or abundant acreage across the state; however excellent examples are identified as Core Habitat to ensure continued protection.



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Understanding Core Habitat Summaries

Following the BioMap and Living Waters Core Habitat species and community lists, there is a descriptive summary of each Core Habitat that occurs in your city or town. This summary highlights some of the outstanding characteristics of each Core Habitat, and will help you learn more about your city or town's biodiversity. You can find out more information about many of these species and natural communities by looking at specific *fact sheets* at www.nhesp.org.

Next Steps

BioMap and Living Waters were created in part to help cities and towns prioritize their land protection efforts. While there are many reasons to conserve land – drinking water protection, recreation, agriculture, aesthetics, and others – BioMap and Living Waters Core Habitats are especially helpful to municipalities seeking to protect the rare species, natural communities, and overall biodiversity within their boundaries. Please use this report and map along with the rare species and community fact sheets to appreciate and understand the biological treasures in your city or town.

Protecting Larger Core Habitats

Core Habitats vary considerably in size. For example, the average BioMap Core Habitat is 800 acres, but Core Habitats can range from less than 10 acres to greater than 100,000 acres. These larger areas reflect the amount of land needed by some animal species for breeding, feeding, nesting, overwintering, and long-term survival. Protecting areas of this size can be

very challenging, and requires developing partnerships with neighboring towns.

Prioritizing the protection of certain areas within larger Core Habitats can be accomplished through further consultation with Natural Heritage Program biologists, and through additional field research to identify the most important areas of the Core Habitat.

Additional Information

If you have any questions about this report, or if you need help protecting land for biodiversity in your community, the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program staff looks forward to working with you.

Contact the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program:

by Phone 508-792-7270, Ext. 200

by Fax: 508-792-7821

by Email: natural.heritage@state.ma.us.

by Mail: North Drive
Westborough, MA 01581

The GIS datalayers of BioMap and Living Waters Core Habitats are available for download from MassGIS: www.mass.gov/mgis

Check out www.nhesp.org for information on:

- Rare species in your town
- Rare species fact sheets
- BioMap and Living Waters projects
- Natural Heritage publications, including:
 - * Field guides
 - * Natural Heritage Atlas, and more!



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BioMap: Species and Natural Communities

Cummington

Core Habitat BM610

Natural Communities

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
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Rich, Mesic Forest Community		Vulnerable
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Plants

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
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Small Site for Rare Plant		
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Core Habitat BM612

Natural Communities

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
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Forest Seep Community		Secure
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Plants

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
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Barren Strawberry	<i>Waldsteinia fragarioides</i>	Special Concern
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Dwarf Scouring-Rush	<i>Equisetum scirpoides</i>	Special Concern
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Invertebrates

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
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Riffle Snaketail	<i>Ophiogomphus carolus</i>	Threatened
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Ski-Tailed Emerald	<i>Somatochlora elongata</i>	Special Concern
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Core Habitat BM614

Plants

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
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Small Site for Rare Plant		
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BioMap: Species and Natural Communities

Cummington

Core Habitat BM624

Invertebrates

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Ocellated Darner	<i>Boyeria grafiana</i>	Special Concern
Rifle Snaketail	<i>Ophiogomphus carolus</i>	Threatened
Twelve-Spotted Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela duodecimguttata</i>	Special Concern

Core Habitat BM650

Plants

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Small Site for Rare Plant		

Core Habitat BM664

Plants

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Small Site for Rare Plant		

Core Habitat BM665

Natural Communities

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Riverside Seep		Imperiled

Plants

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Barren Strawberry	<i>Waldsteinia fragarioides</i>	Special Concern
Muskflower	<i>Mimulus moschatus</i>	Endangered
Spurred Gentian	<i>Halenia deflexa</i>	Endangered

Invertebrates

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Rifle Snaketail	<i>Ophiogomphus carolus</i>	Threatened



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BioMap: Species and Natural Communities

Cummington

Vertebrates

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Spring Salamander	<i>Gyrinophilus porphyriticus</i>	Special Concern



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BioMap: Core Habitat Summaries

Cumington

Core Habitat BM610

Natural Communities

This Core Habitat contains a moderate-sized Rich, Mesic Forest embedded within a large tract of forested land. Rich, Mesic Forests are a variant of northern hardwood forests dominated by Sugar Maple with a diverse herbaceous layer and many spring ephemerals, unusual plants that appear only in spring, in a moist, nutrient-rich environment. Here this mature community is free of invasive exotic species.

Core Habitat BM612

The streams and upland forests within this Core Habitat support rare dragonfly species, including the Riffle Snaketail and the Ski-tailed Emerald. The Core Habitat supports a diversity of plant species, some of which are found within a Forest Seep community. In another part of the Core Habitat, there is a large population of the rare Barren Strawberry. While some of the upland habitat is within the Bryant Mountain State Forest, the majority of this Core Habitat appears to be unprotected.

Natural Communities

This Core Habitat contains a narrow and long seepy hillside that supports a diverse assemblage of plant species in a Forest Seep community. Forest Seeps are hardwood forests found on wet slopes, where groundwater seeps out of the earth. The overstory is similar to that of the surrounding forest, but many typical wetland ferns, shrubs, and other plants occur as well.

Plants

A very large, vigorous occurrence of the Dwarf Scouring-Rush, a diminutive relative of the ferns, grows in cool forest habitat within this Core Habitat. Also within this area is the largest known population in the state of Barren Strawberry, a plant Species of Special Concern.

Invertebrates

This Core Habitat includes streams such as Alder Meadow Brook, Wolf Brook, and Westfield Brook, as well as adjacent forested, unfragmented uplands that are habitat for rare species of dragonflies including the Riffle Snaketail and the Ski-tailed Emerald. This Core Habitat is within dispersal distance of Core Habitat in Cumington, which allows for movement of Riffle Snaketails and other dragonflies between these areas. Pollution and hydrologic alterations originating upstream, downstream, or within this Core Habitat are major threats to the rare species inhabiting the area.



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BioMap: Core Habitat Summaries

Cummington

Core Habitat BM624

Invertebrates

This Core Habitat includes a long stretch of the Westfield River, its tributaries, and surrounding forested uplands that are habitat for rare species of insects such as the Ocellated Darner dragonfly, the Riffle Snaketail dragonfly, and the Twelve-spotted Tiger Beetle. Both the Ocellated Darner and the Riffle Snaketail have been known to inhabit this stretch of the Westfield River for well over 100 years! This Core Habitat is within dispersal distance of Core Habitats in Cummington and Worthington, which allows for movement of Riffle Snaketails and Ocellated Darners between these areas. This Core Habitat appears to be unprotected; hydrologic alteration and pollution originating upstream, downstream, or within this Core Habitat are major threats to the rare species inhabiting the area.

Core Habitat BM665

This Core Habitat encompasses a section of the Westfield River, its tributaries, and adjacent forests. Highlights include a diverse Riverside Seep community, the presence of two Endangered plant species, and high-gradient streams that support Spring Salamanders. This Core Habitat also supports rare species of dragonflies, including the Riffle Snaketail that was first documented here over 100 years ago.

Natural Communities

This Core Habitat contains a moderate-sized Riverside Seep along a narrow section of riverbank on the Westfield River. Riverside Seeps are a mixed herbaceous community that occurs at the base of steep riverbanks where groundwater seeps out of the bottom of the upland slope. This enrichment leads to high species diversity. Although not well-buffered by forested upland, the seep here does contain good species diversity.

Plants

The only current Massachusetts population of the Endangered Spurred Gentian, a slender perennial with purplish-green flowers, grows along cool, mossy shores of the Westfield River. Another Endangered plant species, Muskflower, grows in springy areas and seeps around the river.

Invertebrates

In its northeast portion, this Core Habitat includes a 5-km stretch of the Westfield River, its tributaries, and surrounding forested uplands that are habitat for rare species of dragonflies such as the Riffle Snaketail, which has been known to inhabit this stretch of the Westfield River for well over 100 years! This Core Habitat is within dispersal distance of Core Habitats in Cummington, which allows for movement of Riffle Snaketails between these areas. Most of this Core Habitat is within the protected land of the Gilbert A. Bliss State Forest and the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife's Westfield River Access Area. Nevertheless, conservation of remaining areas of unprotected land within this Core Habitat is desirable to increase the amount of contiguous protected habitat and to help ensure the long-term viability of rare species inhabiting the area.



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BioMap: Core Habitat Summaries

Cummington

Vertebrates

This Core Habitat contains over seven miles of connected, high-gradient river and brook habitats that support populations of Spring Salamanders along the Westfield River and Tower, Oak Hill, and Jewel Brooks in Chesterfield. Over half of this Core Habitat is already protected as conservation land within Chesterfield State Forest.



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Living Waters: Species and Habitats

Cumington

Core Habitat LW355

Exemplary Habitats

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Fish Habitat		-----
Invertebrate Habitat		-----

Fishes

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Bridle Shiner	<i>Notropis bifrenatus</i>	Special Concern
Lake Chub	<i>Couesius plumbeus</i>	Endangered
Longnose Sucker	<i>Catostomus catostomus</i>	Special Concern

Core Habitat LW371

Exemplary Habitats

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
Invertebrate Habitat		-----



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Living Waters: Core Habitat Summaries

Cummington

Core Habitat LW355

This Core Habitat stretches more than 30 miles, encompassing the East Branch of the Westfield River and many of its tributaries from Huntington to Savoy. These freshwater habitats are among the best in the state for fishes and aquatic insects.

The fish communities here are indicative of cold, clean, rocky habitats with flowing waters. For example, a section of the Westfield River in Chesterfield supports a community of Blacknose Dace, Common Shiner, Longnose Dace, Slimy Sculpin, White Sucker, and Lake Chub. These fishes require clean cobble and gravel substrates for spawning and are dependent on fast flowing waters. In a section of Westfield Brook in Cummington, the fish community reflects a relatively small, cold, moderately flowing stream with clean rocky substrates. The fish community it supports is diverse; it consists of Blacknose Dace, Creek Chub, Common Shiner, Brook Trout, Longnose Dace, Slimy Sculpin, White Sucker, Lake Chub, and Bridle Shiner.

The state-Endangered Lake Chub can be found along this Core Habitat, which is one of only two sites in the state that supports this species. This fish requires moderate- to fast-flowing, clear, cold streams with gravel and rubble substrates. In the spring, this species may move large distances to spawn (breed). Excess sediments can degrade the clean gravel needed for spawning and proper egg development. Increases in sediments cloud the water and impair this species' visual feeding.

Another rare fish, the Longnose Sucker, is found in the East Branch of the Westfield River and its tributaries in the Cummington-Windsor area. This fish Species of Special Concern is restricted to the western watersheds of Massachusetts, where it is found in cold, clean, oxygen-rich streams with gravel bottoms. The Longnose Sucker may also migrate many miles to reach its spawning grounds. The eggs are released over the gravel bottom, making them susceptible to excess sedimentation, flow alterations, and increases in water temperature. These habitat degradations can be particularly detrimental to the reproductive success of this slow-growing fish that does not reach maturity until 5 to 7 years of age.

A third rare fish species, the Bridle Shiner, is found in a section of Westfield Brook in Cummington. This is the only known population of Bridle Shiner in the Westfield Watershed. This fish Species of Special Concern has a small range from southern New England to South Carolina, and has been declining or extirpated in much of the region. The Bridle Shiner is typically found in well-vegetated, quiet waters. It feeds on small aquatic insects and other invertebrates, and is an important part of the freshwater ecosystem as prey for larger fishes.

This Core Habitat also provides excellent habitat for aquatic invertebrates. The area includes habitat for several species of state-listed dragonflies and damselflies, from the mainstem of the river up to the small, acidic headwater streams. The Little River also supports a healthy community of the more ecologically sensitive aquatic insects: mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies. The naturally vegetated streambanks help maintain the habitat quality, shading the water to keep it cool and controlling the runoff of sediments, excess nutrients, and water. Sections of this Core Habitat are already protected, but protecting the remaining riparian areas along the Westfield River and its tributaries will aid in maintaining the integrity of these excellent freshwater habitats.



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Living Waters: Core Habitat Summaries

Cummington

Core Habitat LW371

This stream in Cummington supports a healthy community of aquatic insects, including the ecologically sensitive mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies. There is a good diversity of stone sizes in the streambed that provide excellent habitat for these aquatic invertebrates. Between beaver impoundments, the forested stream banks help maintain the high-quality habitat by shading the water to keep it cool, by providing a natural energy source to the stream ecosystem in the form of leaves, needles, and sticks, and by controlling the runoff of sediments, excess nutrients, and water.



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